



## Democrats Work to Strengthen Public Schools

Democrats are united in their efforts to make our public schools the best they can be. To ensure that our schools are successful, Democrats have worked to commit resources to proven strategies that help communities reduce class sizes, modernize public schools, expand access to after-school programs, and improve the quality of their teachers..

**Reduce class sizes.** Democrats, over Republican objections, secured funding for the second round of a six-year initiative to help local school districts recruit, hire and train 100,000 qualified teachers to reduce class sizes in the early grades. As a result, thousands more teachers will be hired, the nearly 30,000 teachers already hired under the program will remain in the classroom, and students will continue to benefit from smaller class sizes.

- **Classrooms are overcrowded.** School enrollment is at a record high of 53.2 million students and is expected to increase each year until 2008. Many schools have more than 30 students per classroom.
- **Smaller class sizes improve student achievement.** Children in classes of fewer than 18 students are more likely to graduate on time, stay in school, enroll in honors classes, and graduate in the top ten percent of their class.

**School modernization.** Democrats have a plan to help communities rebuild, modernize and reduce overcrowding in more than 6,000 public schools. The plan would provide local communities with Federal tax credits to pay the interest on \$24.8 billion in school construction bonds.

- **Schools are out-of-date and unsafe.** One third of all public schools need extensive repair or replacement and the average school building is 42 years old.
- **Rundown schools undermine student achievement.** A growing body of research has linked student achievement and behavior to the physical condition and overcrowding of their schools.

**After-school programs.** This year, more than 2,000 communities applied for 184 after-school grants under the 21st Century Learning Center Program, which provides

funds to schools to operate after-school and summer-school programs. Democrats have fought to triple funding for the program to expand access to more than one million additional children.

- **Millions of children are at home alone after school.** At least five million children and as many as 15 million are left alone at home after school each week. Juvenile crime peaks between the hours of 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. and children who are unsupervised are more likely to be involved in anti-social activities and destructive patterns of behavior.
- **After-school programs help children.** Quality after-school programs have been proven to improve school attendance, reduce juvenile crime, lessen the risk of children becoming victims of crime, and increase student achievement.

**Quality teachers.** Democrats are committed to providing local school districts with \$1.2 billion to recruit excellent teacher candidates, retain and support promising beginning teachers through high-quality mentoring programs, and provide veteran teachers and principals with the ongoing professional development needed to help all children meet high standards of achievement.

- **Too many teachers are unprepared to teach.** More than 12 percent of all newly hired teachers enter the workforce without any training at all, and another 15 percent enter without having fully met State standards.
- **High quality teachers help children succeed in the classroom.** A recent study by the National Commission for Teaching and America's Future found that quality teaching is the single most important factor in determining how well students learn.